

A CASE STUDY OF SEMANTIC & SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH IDIOMS AT SECONDARY LEVEL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This paper is aimed to examine semantic and syntactic features of English idioms at secondary level students of three different schools at Allahabad city and to find out the ability of them in identifying and understanding idioms. A total of 90 students of the secondary level were selected from three English medium schools. The sample of the study were 30 from class sixth, 30 from class seventh, and likewise 30 from eight class. The students were randomly selected from the classes. The collected data helped the researcher to draw out certain conclusion such as the level of the class increases, so will the knowledge increase and the ability to identify and knowing the meaning of idioms depends on knowledge level.

Key words: Idioms, semantic, syntactic, language, learning, secondary school

1.Introduction

Every language in the world has a large number of idioms. It's an essential part of the language, according to Jennifer Seidle & W. McMordie ⁽¹⁾ "Idioms are not a separate part of the language, which one can choose either to use or to omit, but they are essential part of the vocabulary of English". Also, he mentioned that "It is important to realize that idioms are not colloquial expressions as many people believe, they appear in formal style and in slang, in poetry, in the language of Shakespeare and Bible".

Idioms are important or essential for anyone who wants their English sound more native like _ less awkward. In our daily life in order to express ourselves more effectively and clearly, we frequently need to call upon idioms. According to Johnson – Laird ⁽²⁾ "It is difficult to speak spontaneously without lapsing into idiomatic usage".

Hence, the first reason for the importance of idioms is that they are pervasive. "Idioms are an important part of any language and may be said to be an indicator of one's fluency in that language". ⁽³⁾ Idioms, therefore, have a considerable role in a foreign language (FL) as in the mother tongue (MT). Foreign language learners learn not only the grammatical structures and vocabulary of the target language, but the idioms as well to integrate into the culture of the foreign language. Idioms are important for language, reading and social communication. ⁽⁴⁾

Ball ⁽⁵⁾ states as: The F L student wants to know which idioms to use in a given situation. He also wants to avoid the pitfalls of vulgar, inappropriate and incongruous idioms. In short, he wants both information and guidance. As well as he wants these not only to assist him in speaking English but also in understanding it. It follows, therefore, that some of the idioms he learns will be for use in conversation, others for recognition purposes.

As English language is rich in idioms, learning the idioms in English language constitute the soul of the language. Yet, "the plethora of human situations makes it imperative to reduce them to manageable proportions". That is, learners should learn at least enough number of idioms. Tuğlacı ⁽⁶⁾ puts forward that, "Although every language in the world has its specific feature of idioms, none of them can challenge with the ones in English" He maintains "But it is impossible to understand the meanings of the idioms just only knowing the linguistic features and vocabulary of the language. Hence, students learning English will inevitably confront difficulties in understanding idioms and won't be accepted as proficient without knowing the idioms sufficiently" ⁽⁶⁾

2.Reviw of literature

As mentioned above that idioms are a part of the English language and holds an essential part of language. Therefore, its observed that many researchers and various studies have taken up idioms seriously. Some of such researchers and their ardent work has given a real thought to the researcher in particular to carry on this study. Su Sanna Mustonen is of the many, who investigated the translation strategies of idioms on the basis of a prose fiction novel. And concentrated on Donna Tartt's novel *The Secret History* and its Finnish translation Jumalat juhliivat öisin, which aimed to collect the English idioms from the original English-language novel and compared them to their Finnish translation book.

Another such researcher who explored the meaning of idioms with reference with the six parts of the human body (eye, head, mind, hand, tongue, and nose) in the Hijazi dialect of Arabic (henceforth HDA) also used the theoretical perspective of cognitive semantics. The tests prove that the cognitive linguistic hypothesis involved idiomatic expressions which get motivated by conceptual mechanisms of the native speakers of a language. By delving into this he explored how far our conceptual system results are from the kind of being and what we are and the way we interrelate with our physical and cultural environments. The researcher collected idioms from Hijazi dialect dictionaries, and verified their figurative meanings with HDA-speakers. These figurative meanings were classified and then translated, both literally and figuratively into English. Another such area of concern was to gain a deeper understanding of how common English idiomatic expressions in song lyrics are understood by university students with Swedish as their native language. For this Emelie Antonson has sighted the researcher to study the English song lyrics that are often full of idiomatic expressions enabling the listener to understand the message the artist who conveys, that idioms and metaphors help people to gain understanding of the messages the singer is trying to convey. The author

aimed to establish the extent to which Swedish university students with English learning students who have their second language ,but can understand the meanings of some English idiomatic expressions in isolation, and in the context of a song. The researcher when referred to the above related studies was able to bring out this maiden thought into his research done on three different levels of secondary school students comprising of three different social strata's even though emphasis was not much paid on it but it was one of the minor factors taken into account.

3. Research Methodology

The study has aimed to test the secondary level students of three English medium schools of Allahabad. They were from Ethel School, Bethany Convent School and Ewing Christian School, from standard sixth, seventh and eighth. The study measures the ability of the secondary level students in identifying and knowing the meaning of the idioms.

A total of 90 students of secondary level students from three English medium schools in Allahabad city .The subjects of the study were randomly selected ,30 from standard sixth,30 from standard seventh, and 30 students from standard eight.

The materials for conducting the test were containing different sentences which consisted of idioms referring to Animals and Business, 15 sentences referred to Animals and 15 referring to Business. We choose only those two kinds of idioms because the idea was to make the students familiar with day to day routine life. The sentences which were given to sixth standard students were different from the sentences of seventh standard and eighth standard, respectively under the guidance of the supervisor. The researcher selected these sentences from this site www.idiomsconnection.com , because they were standardized .

Sentences were distributed to the students and they were asked to identify the idioms and the meaning of each in the given sentences. The researcher gave the students sufficient time to attempt the test. After collecting data, researcher analyzed the data of each grade in each school, then, analyzed the data percentage for the correct answers and incorrect answers for each grade. The researcher created three tables, each table for one school in order to provide or give complete information about the study.

4. Findings and Discussion

This part lays out the findings for students of each school and discusses the findings in their answers of the sentences. The following are tables for each students of the school in order to find the result for each class and then compared it between the students of each class and between the students of each school. Each table contains the level of the students, correct answers, incorrect answers, percentage of correct answer for each class, percentage of incorrect answers for each class and the total.

"Students level" showed the level of students in each class. "Correct answers" are the correct usage of idioms in each class to know the correct answers or use of the students in each class whereas "Incorrect answers" showed the wrong usage or the incorrect answers of each class. "The percentage of correct answers" to illustrate the percentage of the correct answers of the students in each class. And also "The percentage of incorrect answers" to find the percentage of incorrect answers of student in each class. The researcher collected a "Total" that shows the total of correct answers of all the students, incorrect answers of all students, total percentage of correct and incorrect answers of all students.

4.1 Investigation of Ethel School Students.

The first data set is of students from **Ethel School** (standard sixth, seventh and eight) . According to this data, the researcher found that students of sixth class had little knowledge about the idioms, they were facing difficulty in identifying and also about knowing the meaning of the idioms.

According to the data of sixth class the students didn't answer all the given sentences, for example the highest score of one student was (19 out of 30). The lower score at this level of student was (11 out of 30).The percentage of correct answers was (51%), while incorrect answers was (49%).

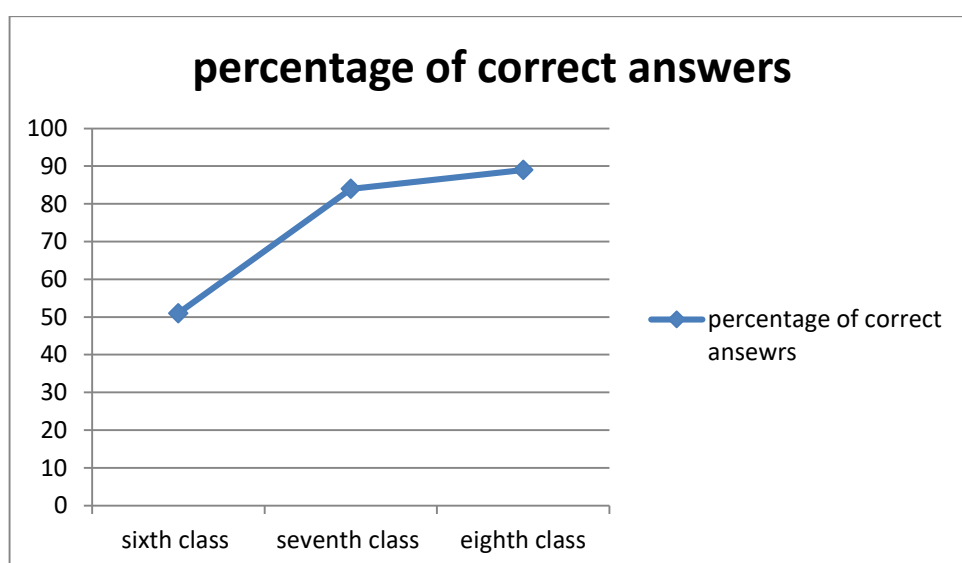
The students of the seventh class of the same school had knowledge about the idioms more than sixth class ,they were completely different from sixth class ,the highest score was (29.5) these students could identify all the idioms from the sentences but didn't know the meaning of one of the idioms thus scored (29.5 out of 30).Whereas the lower score of one of the student was (18 out of 30) .The percentage of the correct answer was (84%) ,and the percentage of incorrect answers was (16%).

The students of eighth class of the same school also have good knowledge about idioms, the total of correct answers were (267.5 out of 300).The highest score of one of the students was(28.5 out of 30),while the lower one was (25 out of 30).The percentage of correct answers was (89.166 %),and the percentage of incorrect answers read (10.834 %).

According to these findings and the data collected from the schools, the researcher can say that the students who belonged to the eighth class were far much better than students of seventh class and sixth class in identifying and giving the meaning of the idioms. The following graphical representation (figure1) marked the results noticeable.

Table 1. Description the Results of the Ethel School Students

Students level	Correct answers	Incorrect answers	Percentage of correct answers	Percentage of incorrect answers
Sixth class	153	147	51%	49%
Seventh class	223	77	84%	16%
Eight class	267.5	32.5	89.166%	10.834%
Total	643.5	256.5	74.722%	25.278%

**Figure 1. The Correct Answers Percentage of Ethel School.**

4.2 Investigation of Ewing Christian School Students

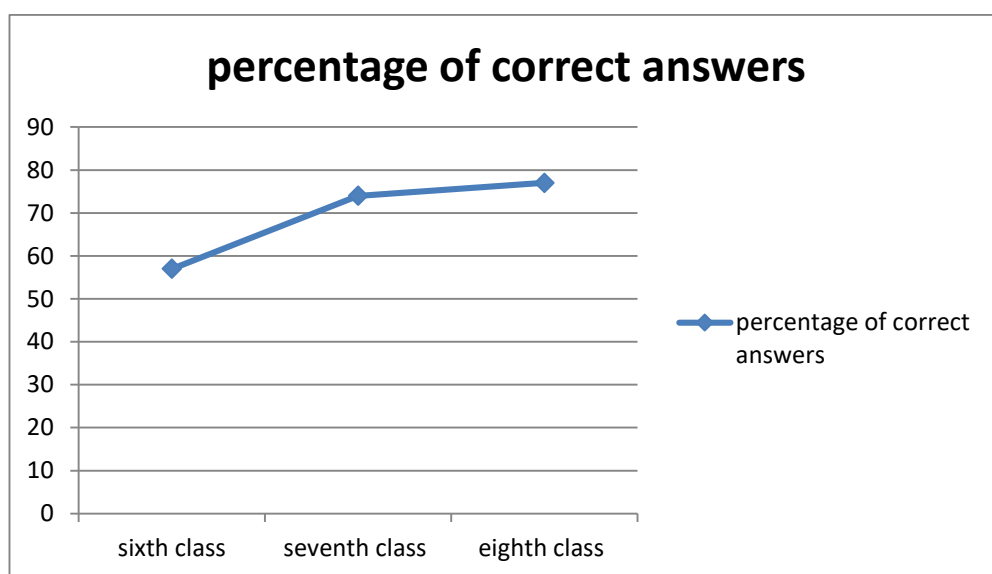
The data collected from **Ewing Christian School**, according to the data the researcher clearly observed that the highest scores were the ones related to eighth class and the lower scores were the ones related to sixth class. According to students of sixth class, the highest score was (21.5 out of 30), while the lowest score was (11 out of 30). The percentage of the correct answers was (56.666%) and the percentage of incorrect answers was (43.334%). It can be significantly noticed that students of sixth class could not identify all the idioms and the meaning.

The answers of the students belonging to seventh class were better than the answers of students of sixth class. The highest score was (25.5 out of 30) and the lower score is (17 out of 30). The percentage of correct answers was (74.166%) and the percentage of incorrect answers was (25.834%).

Whereas the students of eighth class were the best. The lower score was (20 out of 30) and the highest score is (26 out of 30). The percentage of correct answers was (76.833%) and the percentage of incorrect answers is (23.167%). The following graphical representation (figure 2) marked the results more easily noticeable.

Table 2. Description the Results of the Ewing Christian Students.

Students level	Correct answers	Incorrect answers	Percentage of correct answers	Percentage of incorrect answers
Sixth class	170	130	56.666%	43.334%
Seventh class	222.5	77.5	74.166%	25.834%
Eighth class	230.5	69.5	76.833%	23.167%
Total	623	227	69.221%	30.778

**Figure 2. The correct answers percentage of Ewing Christian school**

4.3 Investigation of Bethany Convent School Students.

The table above refers to the third set of data collected from **Bethany Convent School**, according to this data we can mention that the total answers of sixth class are (176), the highest mark is (21.5) and lower mark is (11). The percentage of the correct answers are (58.666%) and the percentage of incorrect answers are (41.334%).

The percentage of correct answers of seventh class is (63.333%) and the percentage of incorrect answers is (36.667%). The highest score is (25) and the lower score is (12). The total correct answers are (190 out of 300)

The students of eighth class were able to identify and analyse the meaning of the idioms more than sixth and seventh class. The total of correct answers is (213 out of 300) and the percentage of correct answers is (71%) while the percentage of incorrect answers is (29%). The following graphical representation (figure 3) makes the results more easily noticeable.

After knowing the total correct answers, the incorrect answers, percentage of correct answers and the percentage of incorrect answers, we can compare between the students level, according to our data that we collected from three secondary level students (sixth, seventh and eighth), we can observe that students who belong to sixth class in each school that we collected the data from it, could not answer all the given sentences which have idioms. In addition to the percentage of the correct answers of each class in each school, we can notice that students of sixth class couldn't identify and give the meaning of all idioms. That means the students of sixth class don't have a lot of knowledge about idioms and its meaning, they were facing difficulty in identifying and analyzing the meaning of all idioms. During the analysis of data of the students, we noticed that they were able to identify the idioms from the given sentences but they don't know the meaning of these idioms.

Here, we have to mention that the students of seventh class in the schools which we got the data from have better understanding of the idioms than sixth class, and according to the data and the percentage of the correct answers in each table can prove that students of seventh class have better understanding of idioms than sixth class.

While the students of eighth class were the best, they could identify and give the meaning of most of idioms in the given sentences.

After the classification between the grades, we need to compare between the students in every grade in each school, according to our data we can say that students of sixth class in Bethany Convent school had best knowledge of idioms, Ewing Christian school were second best, Ethel school at the third step.

Seventh grades, the students of Ethel School were the best, students of Ewing Christian School followed them, then students of Bethany Convent School.

Eighth grades, the students of Ethel school got highest percentage, then, students of Ewing Christian school and the students of Bethany Convent school. The following graphical representation (figure 4) makes the results more easily noticeable.

Table 3. Description the Results of the Bethany Convent Students

Students level	Correct answers	Incorrect answers	Percentage of correct answers	Percentage of incorrect answers
Sixth class	176	124	58.666%	49.334%
Seventh class	190	110	63.333%	36.667%
Eighth class	213	87	71%	29%
Total	579	321	64.333%	38.333%

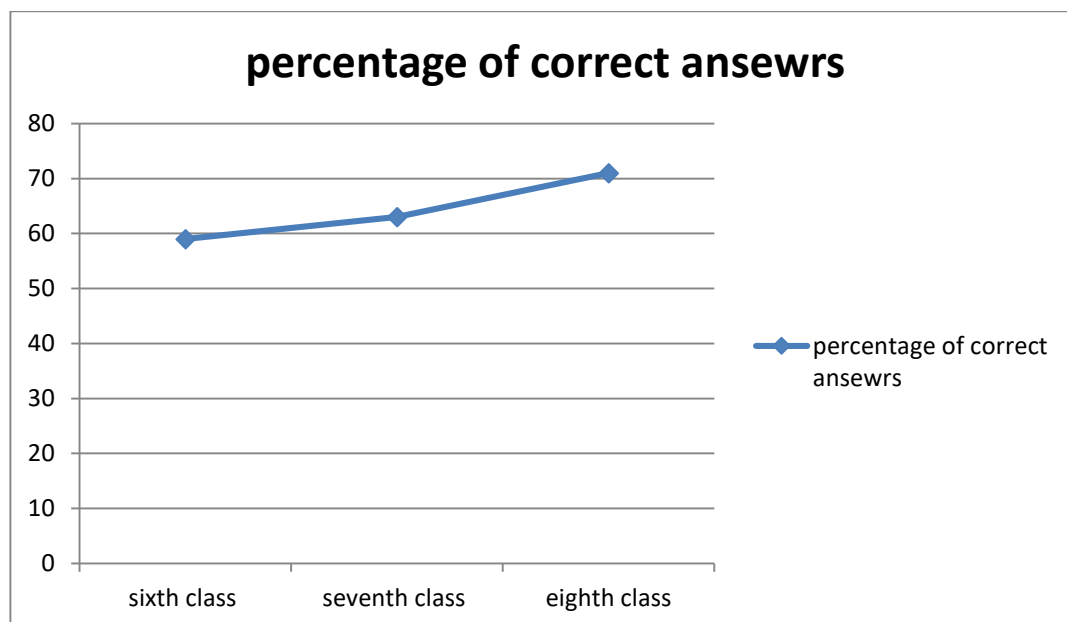


Figure 3. The Correct Answers Percentage of Bethany Convent School.

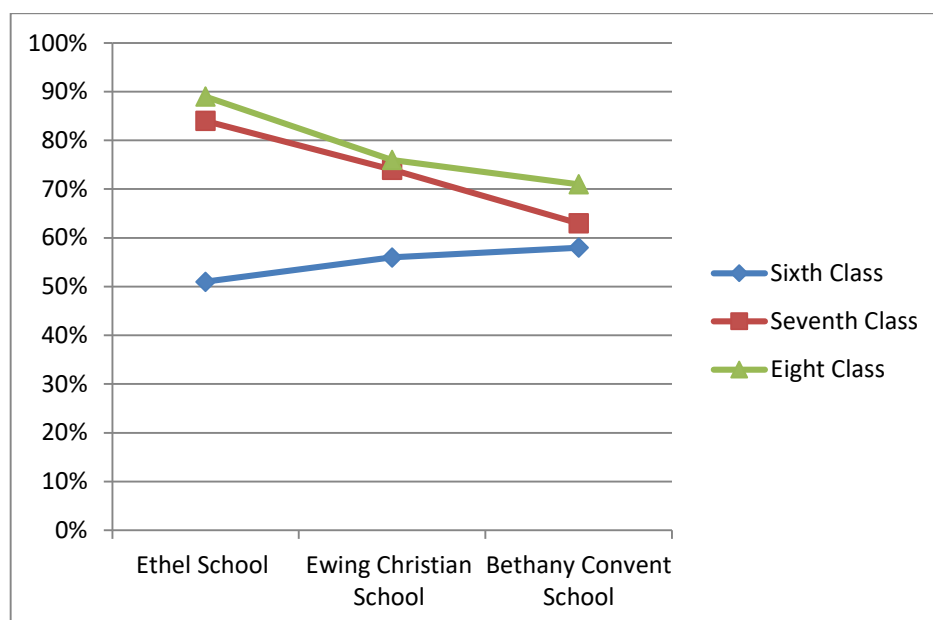


Figure 4. Total Percentage of the Correct Answers

5. Conclusion /Suggestions

In this study the researcher has examined the semantic and syntactic features of English idioms at three secondary level students. The researcher has seen that some hindrances faced by the learners in identifying and giving the meaning of the idioms.

This interference could be identified as a gradual shift, from the sixth class which showed maximum problem, but with increase of the level it decreased i.e. in the seventh class and eighth class there was much understanding of the idioms.

The researcher through this analysis of the data collected also concludes that there are changes with regard to the school level as well. The percentage of the correct answers were different between the grades in each school, it increased according to the grades for example, the percentage of the correct answers of the sixth class in Bethany school is (58.66%), in Ethel School was (51%) and in Ewing Christian School was (56.66%). While the percentage level in the seventh class was different from the percentage of sixth class in each school, for example, the percentage of the correct answers in Bethany School is (63.33%), in Ethel School is (84%) and in Ewing Christian School was (74.166%). The percentage of the correct answers of eighth class and even the percentage of the correct answers of the eighth class were different from sixth and seventh class, for example, Bethany School (64.33%), Ewing Christian School (76.83%) and Ethel School (89.16%).

According to the researcher's case study the researcher would like to state, that the ability to identify and recognize the meaning of the idioms depends on the knowledge level and we can prove that by our data collected from the three secondary level students, with reference to tables 1,2 and 3. Another drawbacks and differences identified signify the level of the school. Even though the samples from the three schools were following the CBSE curriculum yet a stark difference can be seen in their performance. It was noticed by the researcher that the teachers of the schools varied in competence and creativity while handling the assigned curriculum. Thus, the output of the three schools showed varied competence level. The seriousness of the administration too lacked. Another important aspect was the frequency of self-learning opportunities extended to students too varied.

Suggestions:

Using idioms is all about learning and taking a step that helps in moving towards higher English level. Allocating time for self enhancement of the language is a requirement. We need to be cautious in building vocabulary, and then being mindful of using the words at various occasions, to be familiar with. This will make us be aware of the situation and the context the word and the idiom that's related to it. While reading a text it is advised to inculcate the habit of sitting with a pen and a notepad, when visiting libraries. The starring situations and usage of language if noted can help us ponder over it later and ultimately assimilate in our mind. Encouraging students in downloading number of *Words Vocabulary apps* available too can make the journey towards learning pleasing and interesting. Thus, initiating self-learning.

As the study states that there are stark changes seen with regard to the school level as well, we can suggest that the teachers handling the classes should have basic education and interest. They should be trained to frame activities as per the need of the class. By doing so the teacher will be able to do justice to the student, the curriculum and herself. This the researcher feels because she is the only one who can observe the students need and likewise plan out a class plan to make the students reach the level.

So, as we set our English goals to be higher, we need to remember we can't bite more than we can chew and take it slow for Rome was not built in a day.

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